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Editors' Notes

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Editors' Notes

D'ESTA LOVE AND STUART LOVE

Many of us have tended to view the prophets and prophecy in the Old Testament with an idealized—perhaps romanticized—perspective. For example, a popular view is that prophets like Amos more or less held a crystal ball in which they could see the future of God's people. Certainly this was not the case, and with this issue of *Leaven*, we want to come to grips with the prophets and people of a time thousands of years removed from our lives but in that process see how really up-to-date these ancient writings are for Christians and churches today. To use Amos once more as an example, we will learn something of what it was like for a peasant farmer to lose his land through exorbitant taxation and/or fines and to be sold into slavery without any actual redress in the courts because the legal system was stacked against him. We'll see how Amos's indignation grew out of what he actually observed, business people hurrying away from worship so that they could make money in their shops at the expense of the poor and needy—using false weights, selling the chaff and the sweepings of the wheat that the peasants had grown but were now forced to buy back at prices they couldn't afford. We will witness the great chasm that separated the people's worship and their failed pursuance of justice and righteousness and the material significance of what it meant for the wealthy to recline on beds of ivory but not grieve over what Amos called "the ruin of Joseph." The more we read and learn the more we discover afresh how authentic, that is, how true to life were these prophets. They served God amidst real people and struggled with definite social issues and problems in a tangible world.

Our guest editor, **Jennifer S. Green**, is well equipped to lead our study for this issue. Ms. Green is finishing her Ph.D. in Old Testament studies at Princeton Theological Seminary. She has achieved numerous academic awards and fellowships and has taught at several schools such as Columbia Theological Seminary, Princeton Theological Seminary, and Abilene Christian University. You may recall an article she wrote for the *Leaven* symposium on 1 Corinthians (Volume 9, Number 3).

Ms. Green introduces this issue and its writers below. But first, we would like to introduce two new Advisory Board members, **Jerry Taylor** and **Alfred Darryl Jumper**. Dr. Taylor teaches at Abilene Christian University, preaches extensively especially among African-American churches, and is a humble and forceful church leader. Dr. Jumper is a pediatric anesthesiologist who lives in Los Angeles and is a member of the Crenshaw Church of Christ where he is an effective leader and teacher of God's word. We are grateful that these two devoted Christians now serve on the Advisory Board of *Leaven*.



Some of the most beautiful poetry of the Bible comes to us from a group of prophets who testified to God's word in the eighth century B.C. The following words have become quite familiar to many of us:

For I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings." (Hos 6:6)

But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream." (Amos 5:24)

He has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you, but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God? (Mic 6:8)

... though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be like snow." (Isa 1:18)

The beauty and familiarity of these words, though, should not cause us to miss the startling and sometimes horrifying claims that the prophets made. This edition of *Leaven* aims to lift up some of those claims and reflect on how readers might hear them—how we might be surprised by them, humbled by them, and moved to action by them—in our own cultural and political contexts.

Reflection on our own historical contexts arises from the close connection of the prophets' words to the historical context of the eighth century. Theirs were not disembodied words floating above historical reality or predicting events in the distant future but words entrenched in the nitty-gritty of everyday life, speaking to real people in real historical and political situations. Religious life, said the prophets, is not a private, spiritualized affair but one that actively engages the political, economic, and communal realm. **Rick Marrs** illuminates the concreteness of the prophets' words in the opening article by explaining some of the difficult issues characterizing the time period.

The next four articles articulate specific themes in this prophetic material, raised immediately by specific situations in the eighth century but, as the authors point out, certainly showing relevance to our own time and culture. Picking up on the literary shape of Isaiah with its sharp juxtaposition of scenes of judgment and redemption, **Charme Robarts** argues for the need to reflect seriously on sin and hope in modern times. **Joe Hays** finds convicting economic implications in the words of Amos that lead to autobiographical reflection and suggestions for economic justice in local communities. **Beth Phillips** also considers the economic implications of the prophets but focuses on injustices—and opportunities for action—in the broader, globalized world community. **Katie Hays** reflects on the issue of injustice as well but from a different angle. Her article explores the New Testament's grappling with a text from Isaiah that anticipates an end to injustices of all kinds, demonstrating how our understanding of the Bible can be enriched by reading different biblical texts in conversation with each other.

The final two articles on this theme provide resources for further engagement with the eighth-century prophets. **Linda Parker** reports how one church has organized and implemented a major, congregation-wide study of these and other prophetic texts. **John Willis**, well-known to many for his expertise on the prophets of the eighth century, particularly Micah, provides a detailed reading guide for further exploration and meditation. Concluding the issue are two communion meditations by **Markus McDowell** and **Greg Taylor**, a fictional piece by *Emery Stoops*, and a worship service by **Lee Magness**.

The texts written by the prophets of the eighth century offer us countless insights about human and divine nature, but at the moment, I feel particularly challenged by their witness to the importance of criticism. Certainly, this aspect is what makes the prophets distasteful to many modern palates, but perhaps that is telling in itself. Criticism is necessarily uncomfortable and costly when directed toward ourselves and our own communities. We have all made various commitments to the present, dominant powers, and honest self-criticism means we will have something to lose. Because our communities have also made such commitments, those who criticize them—no matter how lovingly or honestly—will be called unpatriotic, unrealistic, disruptive of unity, or self-serving. The prophets, however, tell us that these souls may also be called *faithful*, continuing a long tradition of testifying to God's word in this way.

JENNIFER GREEN